

JEAN BOGHOSSIAN
A CONSTANT FLAME

SALEH BARAKAT
GALLERY

JEAN BOGHOSSIAN
A CONSTANT FLAME

A Constant Flame

Keep a little fire burning, however small, however hidden
Cormac McCarthy, The Road

I want to write about what is elemental, about those ways of structuring the world, and I want to do this because this work is elemental, speaks to the primordial, the roots of things. It is a preference of mine, this place of root, not exactly a beginning, if one thinks of the trees, and how root systems continue on, connecting with other living structures, but something that begins, is always a reminder of what is hidden and vast, perhaps always a little unknown, and the relief of that unknowing.

As I write I think about fire, the striking of a match, the catch of a flame, hand cupped, protective, keeping, light. If a window is open, even a fan turns nearby, the flame will shudder, hands a barrier between you and the dark. Blow out the match, or watch it fade, and smoke rises, a small plume that hits the olfactory sense, invades gently mouth, nose, eyes, the ash that falls away, burning orange transformed to dense, flaking black, crumbles in a second, drops ungainly to the table where it finds new form, rests, almost skeletal, holding the shape of what was before.

These few observations catch an action that might be repeated a thousand times in a life, but rarely noticed. Our relation to fire is often an everyday connection, but nonetheless profound. Jean Boghossian is an artist who has taken the everyday moment of creating fire and woven around it the entirety of his artistic practice, the flame, its smoke and he, creating a rhythmic ebb and flow of elemental force through his densely layered canvases, wood sculptures and ceramics.

Fire is a foundational element, included in the structure of all ancient cultures, part of every classical elemental grouping, considered important for its transformative, warming and active properties. In cultural memory the idea of fire retains these properties, a reminder of devouring power, if also warmth, light, hope in the dark. Our current times, starkly destructive, not only in this region, but across the world, require a reminder of both aspects of fire; the possibility of light and hope, if also of wrath, incomprehension, fury.

In his arresting Towers of Babels series, Boghossian reconsiders this ancient myth, seems to address the current state of the world; it is a communication from the deep past to the present that is a reminder of the human history of endeavour, of building, of communicating across cultures, our shared and positive humanity. Indeed, on looking at his work, it may be made of fire, but also at play are the depth and swirling natures of wind, smoke, water, metal, a reminder that all elements, all structures, are connected, that where one force ends another is beginning, and that we share something with each.

Boghossian has noted that his work is a fire dance, a search for balance within chaos. Fire is a substance that can be as gentle, supportive and soft as it can be roaring and extreme, rests always on the edge, the excitement of rapid, unexpected change, at the mercy of wind and water to extinguish or expand. Fire is Boghossian's way of showing that nature has its own way, fire as representative of the natural world, the fundamentals of life. Then, in combining this elemental fire force with his own skill and tenacity he hints at the significance of the layering of human complexities and subtleties onto this already potent mixture.

In Boghossian's practice fire is a constant, a stability that may be as significant as the potential for chaos. The constancy of fire lies on the gentle end of its spectrum; the warming fire of the hearth, a torch lighting a way in the dark, the quiet necessity of the flame to human life. While there is always the capacity for such peaceful flames to burst forth violently, to become untamed, dangerous, they are most often truly humble, speaking to home, peace, warmth. Such controlled, domestic flame is the softer aspect of fire and smoulders long after the first spark has been extinguished.

And so, although for Boghossian fire appears to perform a primitive function, and he has described it as a somewhat violent element, there is also stability, a fire that is constant and habitual. His work lies between two extremities; on the one side holding transformative power, a danger that can be fast and hard to contain, and on the other side its warming, healing capacities. Again, we are reminded that each element, each part of life holds such tension – hard and soft, danger and safety, fear and confidence.

Boghossian's forthcoming exhibition at Saleh Barakat Gallery draws together painting, wood sculptures and ceramics. In his works, materials such as oil, pigments, smoke, ashes, paper, wood, clay and acrylic are combined with techniques including folding and collage to combine with fire. Tending increasingly toward abstraction, there is an organic movement to his explorations in ceramics, which he has undertaken over the last eight years, a material with a natural relationship with the flame, kiln, oven, the clay becoming hard, brittle, stable under its heat. In all of his material explorations there is density, depth, sensitivity and thickness, crackling, cracking, marbling, surface.

It is not always easy to see where smoke begins and another material ends. At times, as in his eruptive volcanic series, the relation to fire seems to lie in the subject as much as the handling, the moment of eruption, volcanic ash and lava flying across the canvas. At other times the connection is more defiantly material, as in his smoke signals series, the smoke itself becoming the subject of the composition as well as material. Boghossian places himself within a tradition of action and abstraction, leaning towards art povera, feeling an affinity among artists such as Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana, Jannis Kounellis, as well as the action-oriented spatialism of Jackson Pollock and Yves Klein. Any view into his work might therefore consider carefully the action and reaction of materials, as much as any visual specificity that the final work might accrue. Indeed, his work plays out not in an isolated relation to a tradition of painting, but in a clear dialogue with the wider world, his use of fire as a constant pointing repeatedly to what is most simple, humble, of the world, while still connecting to the world of painting and ceramics.

However significant, the flame is only a part of this story, and also at play are colour, texture, what something created visually is somehow 'like'; the bark of a tree, a volcanic eruption, a cedar, the simple rhythm of bones emerging, or the glitch in the machine. At times, as in the Towers of Babels there seems to be an explicit challenge to an established order. Here, the manipulations of clay, the layers, surface texture and sculptural aspects, meld to become a commentary on the nature and history of human life in the face of todays' destructive forces.

Boghossian's work holds the humility of nature, of standing in front of awe-inspiring forms, views, structures, the sublime majesty of the volcano, the cedar, even the possibility of language, the history of myth, of forceful action and transformation. In an era of violence and destruction, rapid growth and fast-paced technological advance, Boghossian connects the elemental with the human, releasing the human into nature, a reminder that there is a connection of past and present, a possibility of growth in harmony with the world instead of at its expense.

Boghossian's "fire dance" is a delicate search for balance within chaos, the transformation of surface through attention, skill and care, the humble and violent fire representing both sides of life, and of humanity.

Amy Todman
September 2026

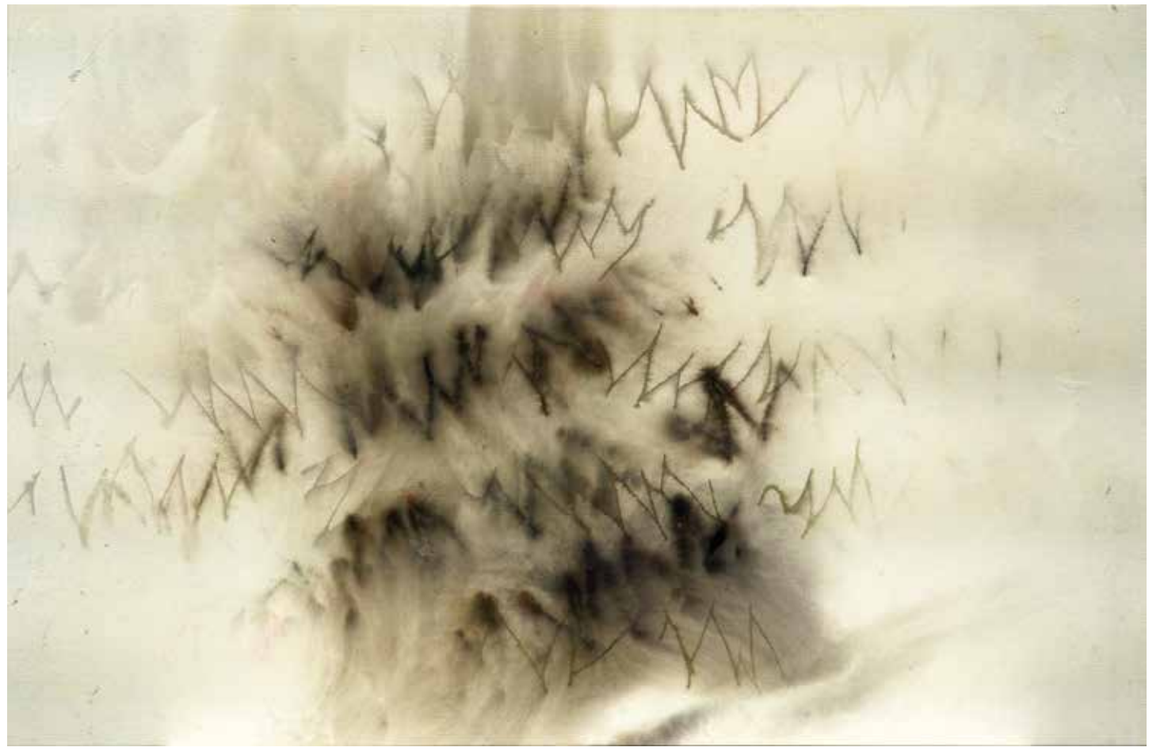


Jean Boghossian burning in his studio in Brussels | Photo © Studio Jean Boghossian

Abstract Writings series

"Abstract Writings" is a series in which Jean Boghossian continues his exploration of fire and smoke, transforming them into instruments of writing. On the surface, burn marks, traces, and swirling smoke lines form an abstract script, freed from any literal meaning. Inspired by the tradition of calligraphy, these works create a universal visual language where every mark becomes breath, rhythm, and memory.

This gesture, both meditative and experimental, turns fire into a tool for reflection and creation. It bridges ancient traditions with contemporary forms, in an exploration of the sign, the trace, and transformation. Abstract Writings embodies a quest for harmony between destruction and revelation, between the disappearance of matter and the emergence of meaning."

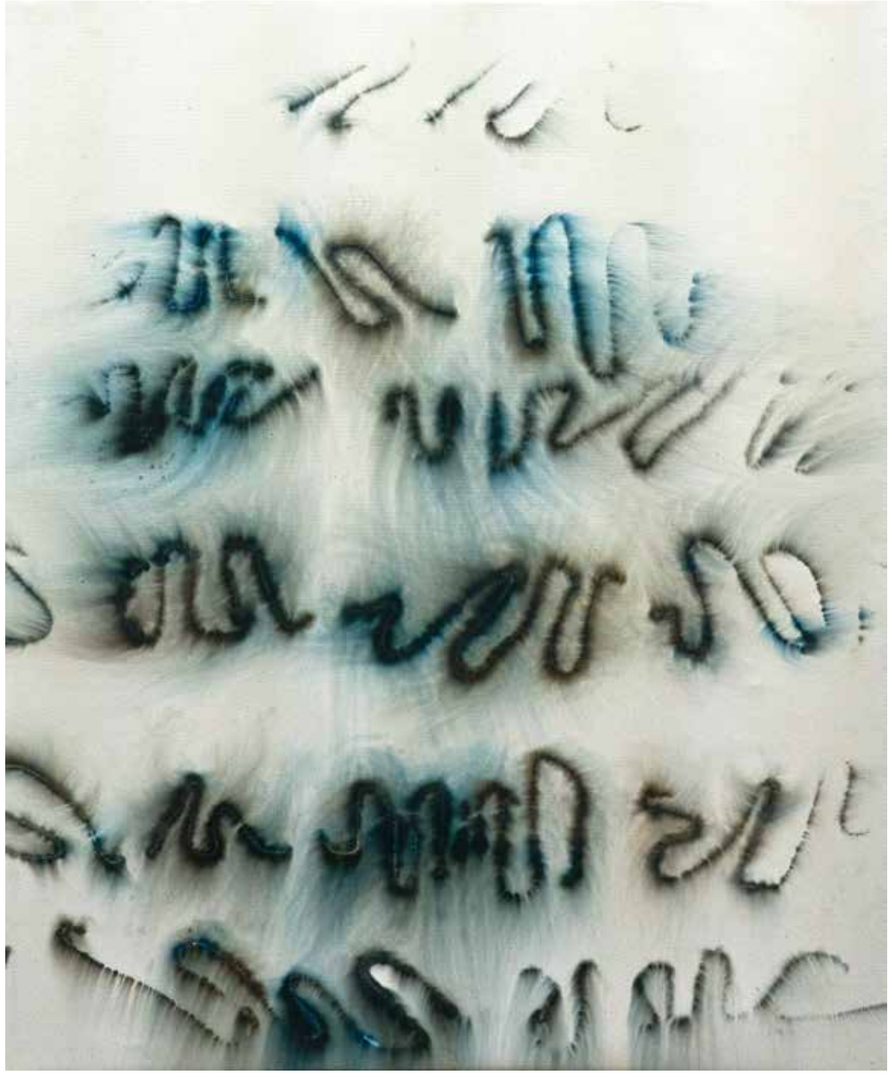


Abstract Writings #99

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 59x95cm | 2023



Abstract Writings #20
Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 84x70 cm | 2021



Abstract Writings #73
Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 98x81 cm | 2023

Abstract Writings #100

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 59x115 cm | 2022



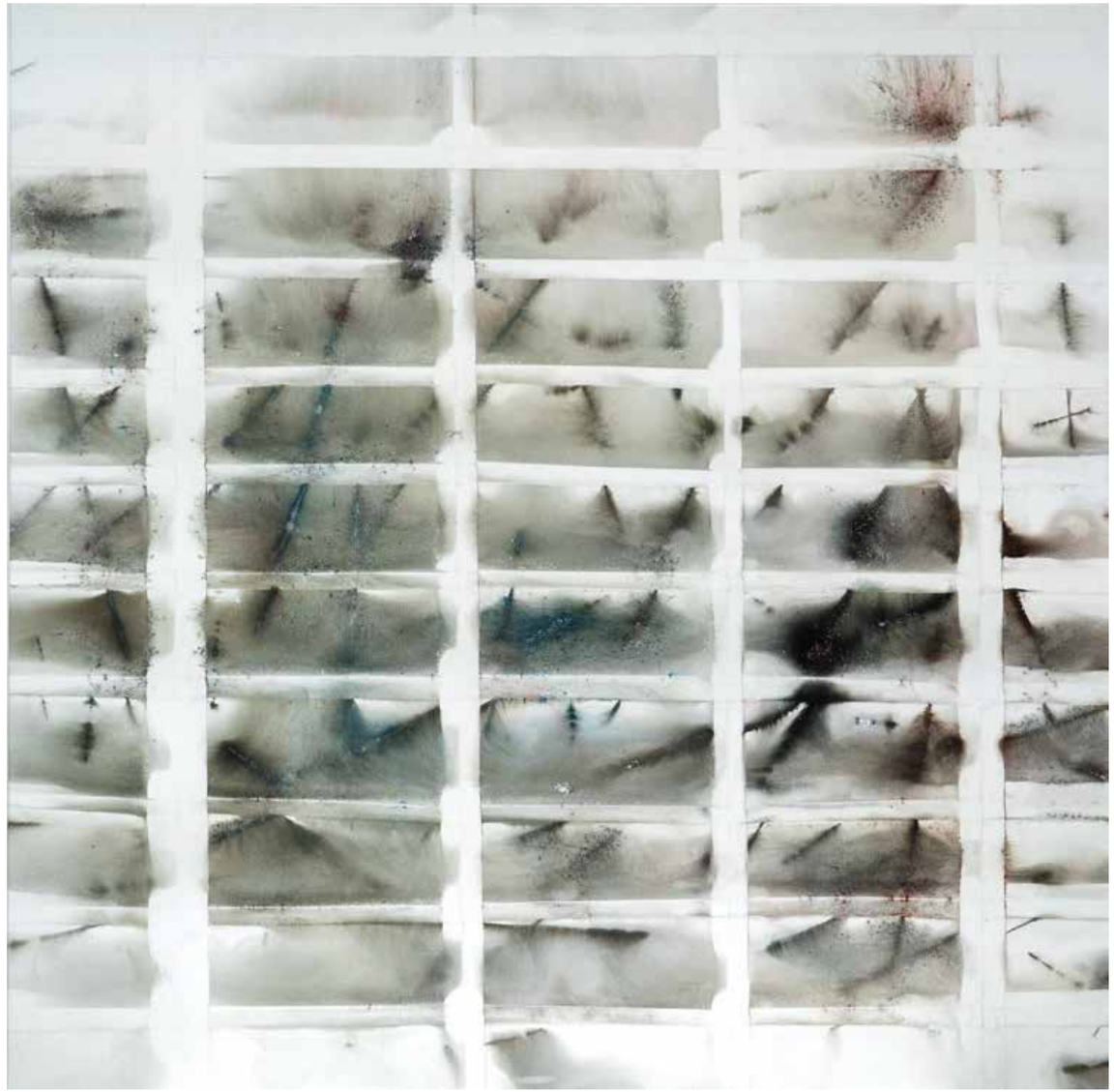
Abstract Writings #101

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 59x115 cm | 2022



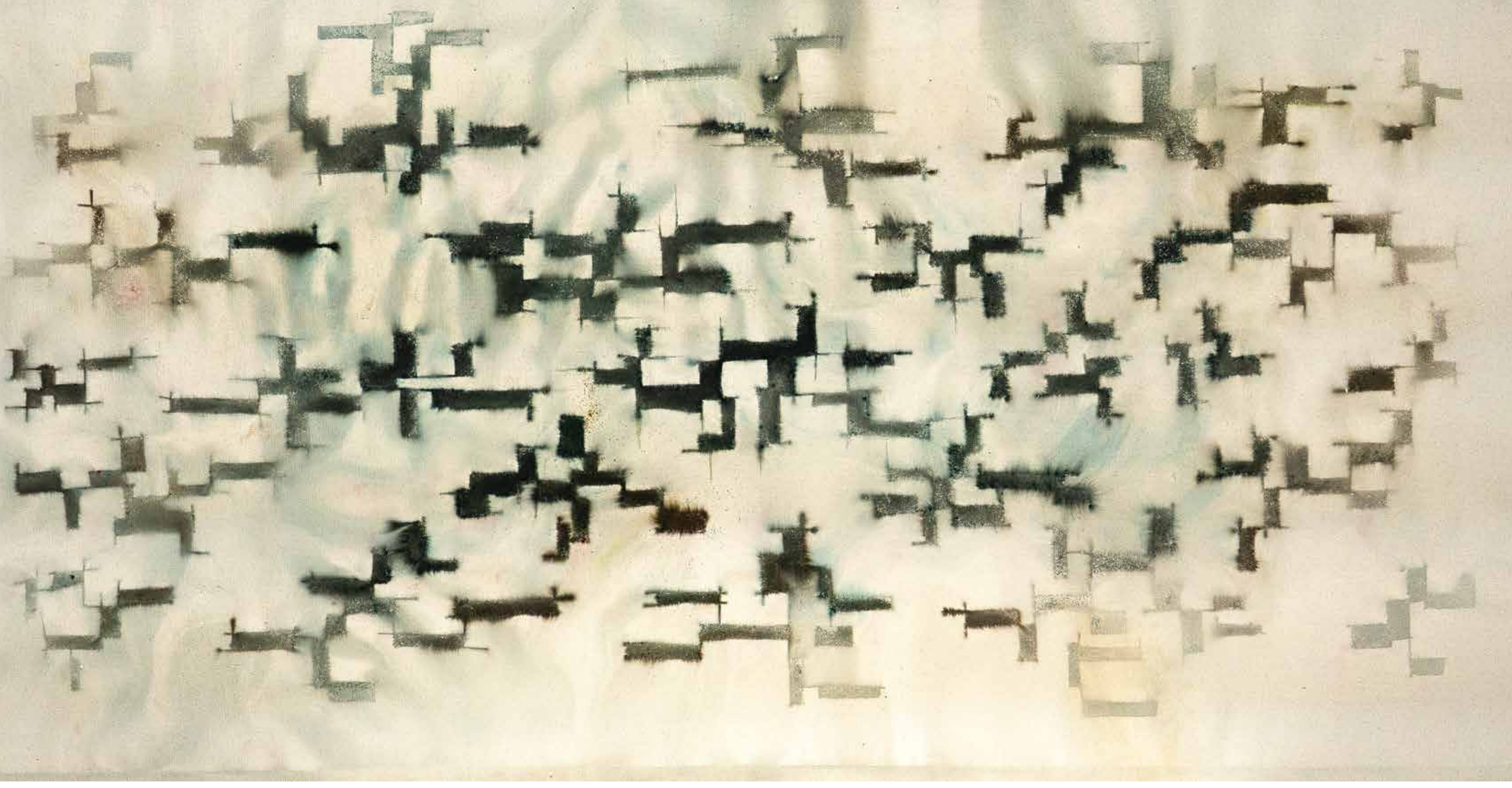
Abstract Writings #72

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 118x78 cm | 2023



Abstract Writings #17

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 98x98 cm | 2022



Abstract Writings #102

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 62.5x118 cm | 2022



Abstract Writings #67

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 95x348 cm | 2023

Ashes series

In the “Ashes” series, Jean Boghossian works with the very substance of ash to create abstract compositions in which paint and the remnants of fire converge. Ash becomes a tactile material, meticulously integrated into the surface through layering and collage. These works reveal an ongoing exploration of the transformation of burned matter, where every mark bears the memory of combustion. Each trace captures the subtle poetry of fire as it shifts from destruction to creation, allowing the material to speak through its own metamorphosis.



Ashes #21

Ashes and burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 89x65 cm | 2021



Ashes #22

Ashes and burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 89x65 cm | 2021



Ashes #24

Ashes and burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 89x65 cm | 2021

Cedars series

The “Cedars” series brings together a collection of works in which the motif of the cedar tree, a symbol deeply rooted in Jean Boghossian's personal and emotional history, frequently recurs. Evoking Lebanon, a country that touches him deeply, this tree becomes a recurring form in his work, sometimes figurative, sometimes abstract, conveying memory and resilience.

Through flre, smoke, colour and matter, the artist constantly reinvents this emblematic silhouette. The cedar thus becomes a universal sign of strength and continuity, a bridge between roots and transformation, between memory and creation.



Cedar #3

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 100x100 cm | 2017





Cedar #27

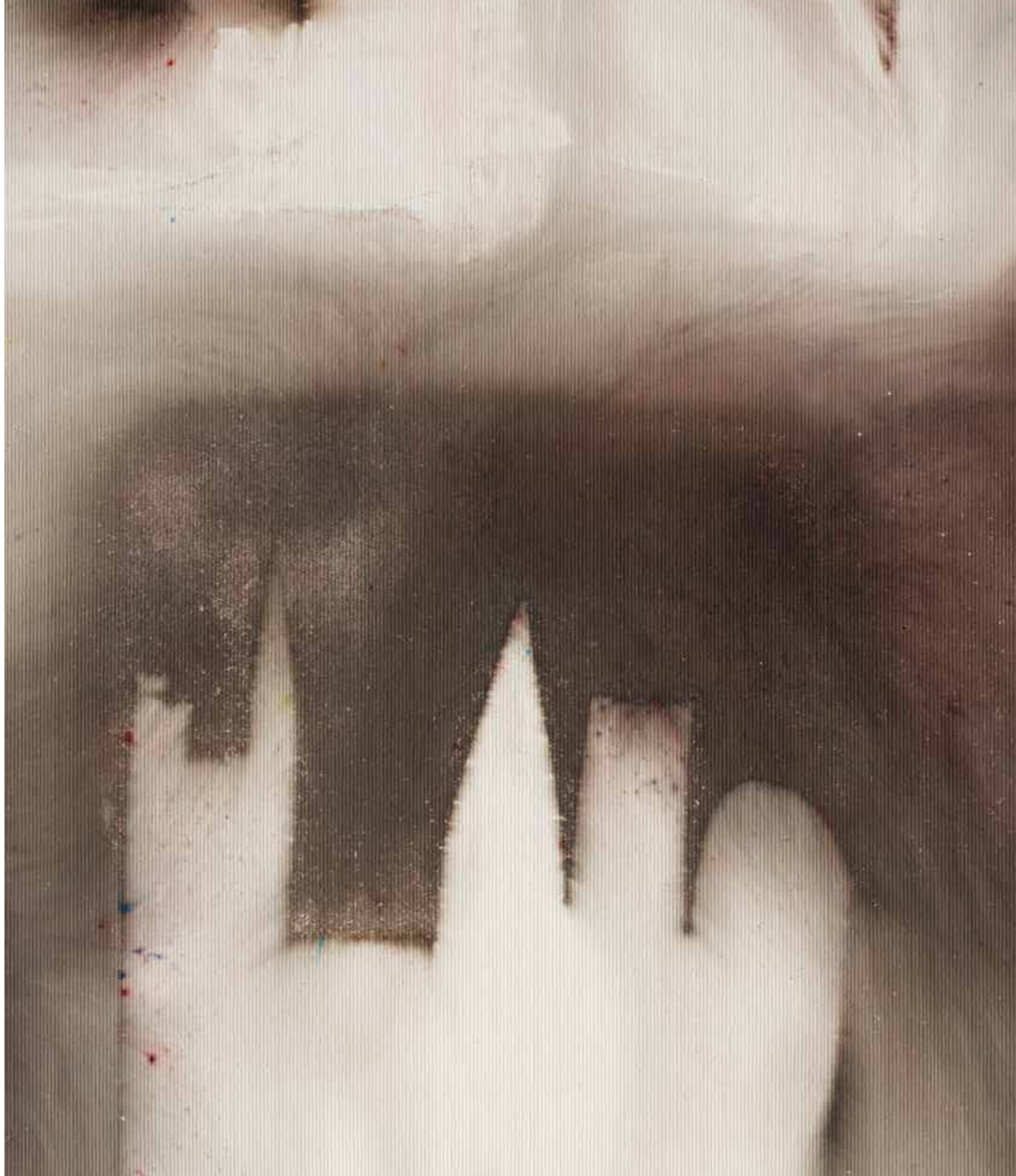
Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 89x65 cm | 2017

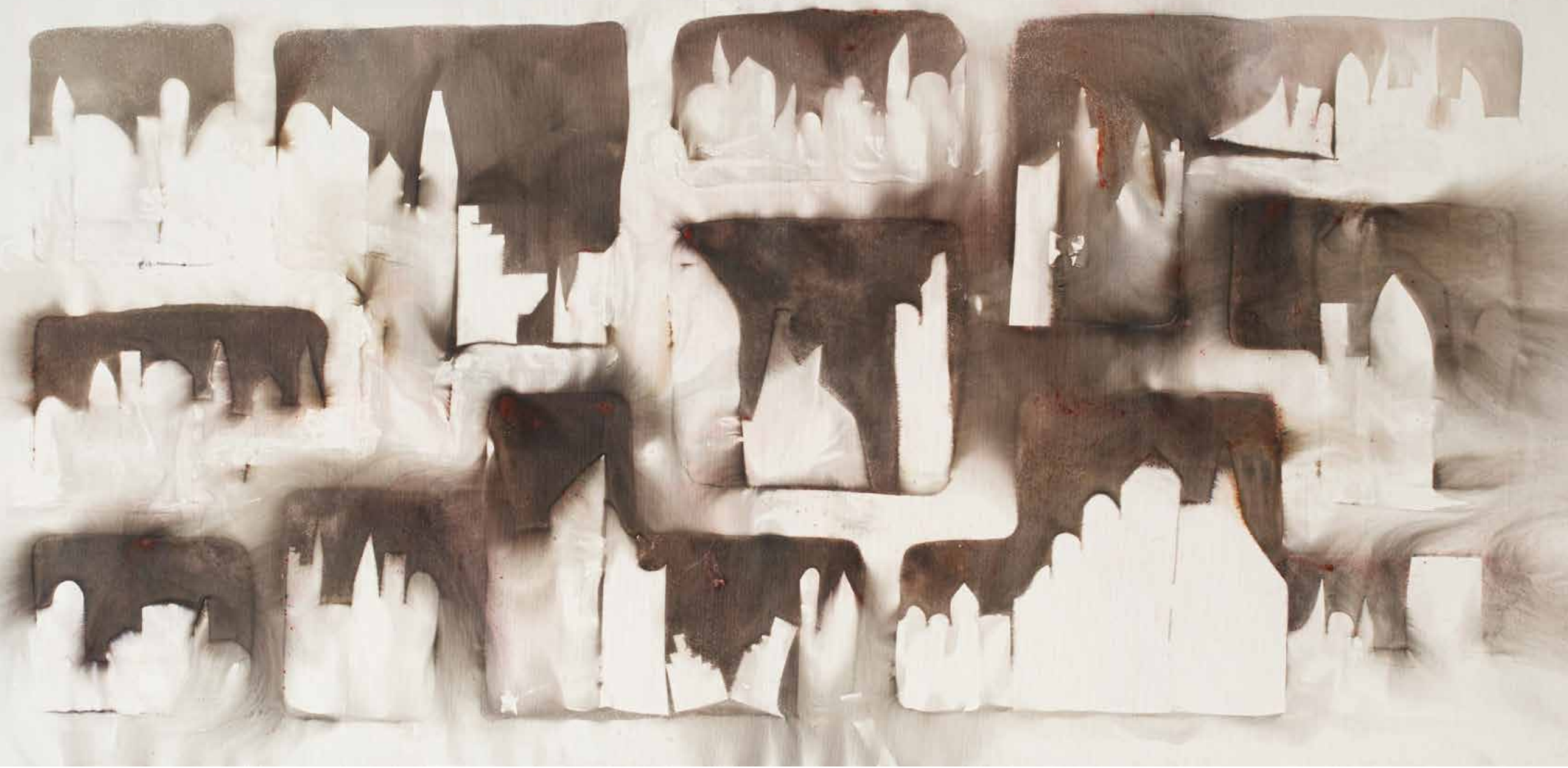


Cedar #28
Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas
120x160 cm | 2021

Narratives series

In the “Narratives” series, Jean Boghossian uses smoke and pigment to reveal a set of shapes and rhythms that suggest the beginning of a story. The traces respond to each other, linking together like fragments of a story in the making. Between abstraction and evocation, the artist explores the possibility of a visual narrative born from the movement of matter and the repetition of motifs.





Smoke Signals #12

Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 121x243 cm | 2023



Smoke Signals #16

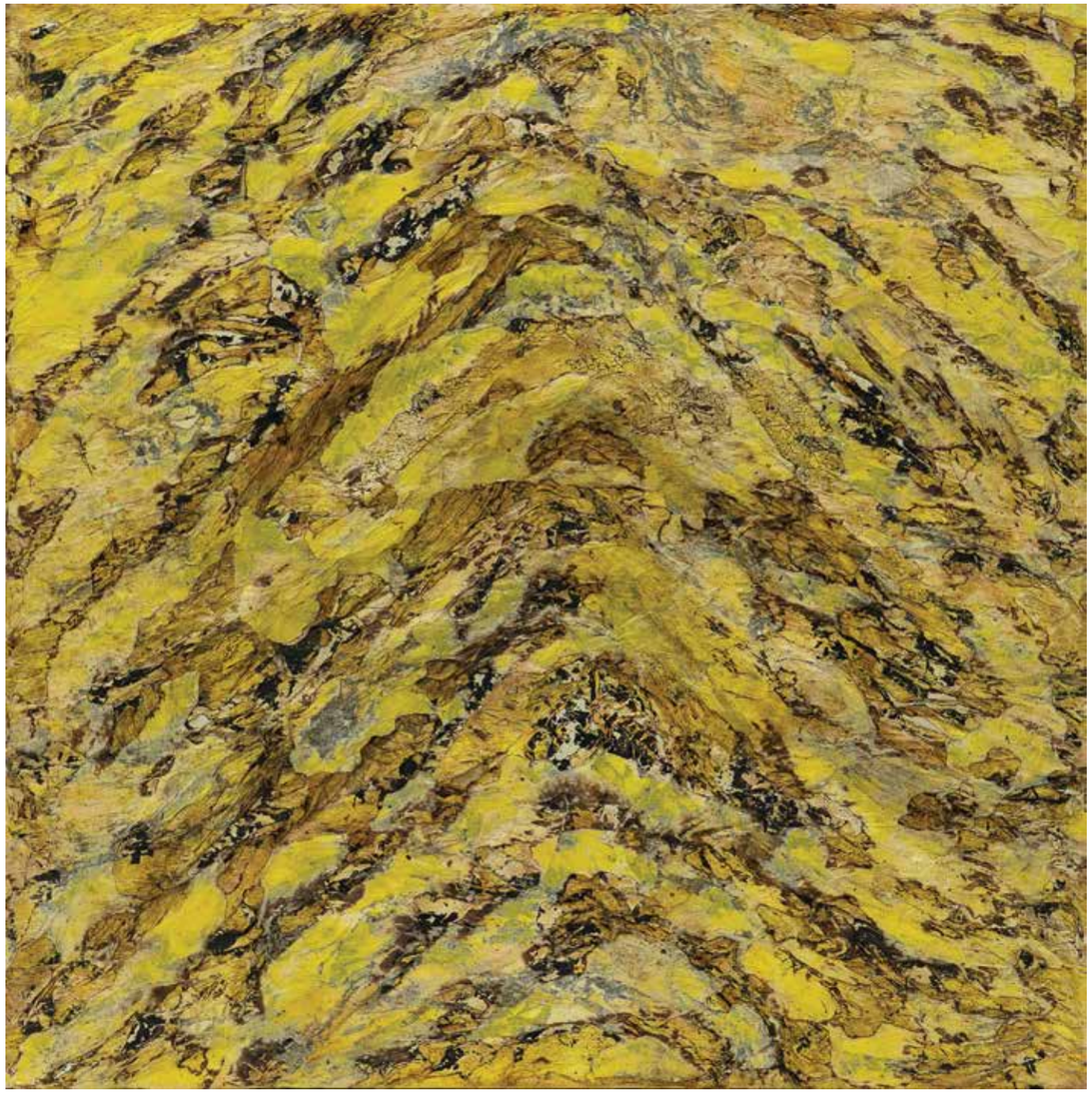
Smoke and pigments on acrylic on canvas | 140x244 cm | 2023

Layers series

In the “Layers” series, Jean Boghossian explores painting as a field of superimposition and depth. The artist works through successive layers of paper, color, ash, and fire, revealing the richness of the strata that compose the surface.

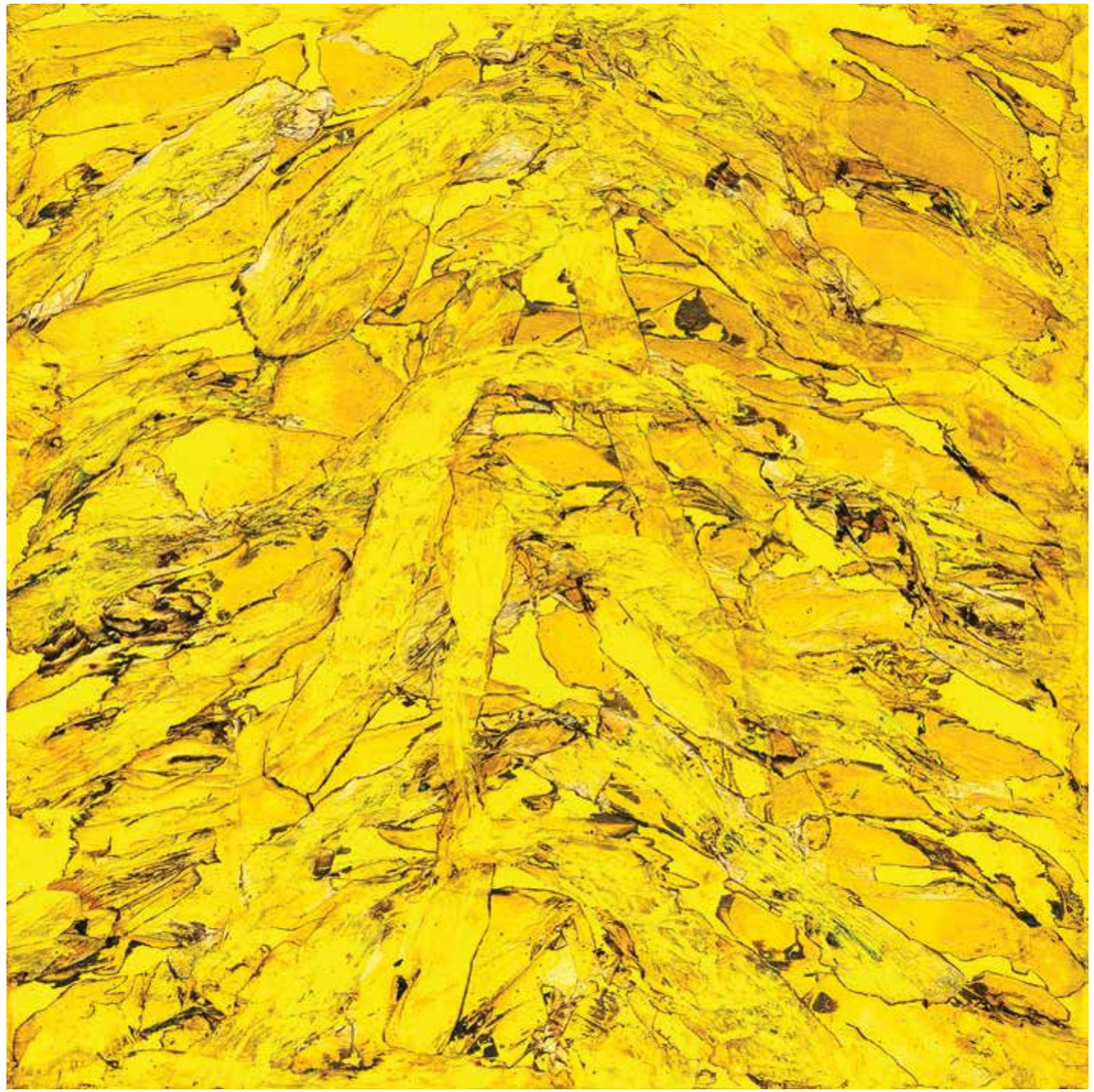
This process gives rise to works of great visual complexity, in which each level contributes to the overall composition. Color—sometimes burned, sometimes delicately applied—becomes a space of resonance and rhythm. In a metaphorical sense, the series symbolizes the idea that we are all made of intricate layers and strata.





Layers #48

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 85x85 cm | 2021



Layers #49

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 85x85 cm | 2022

Rhythms series

In the "Rhythms" series, Jean Boghossian meticulously arranged collages of papers set in orthogonal alignments provide a structured canvas that is layered with multiple textures. This geometric base is set against monochromatic backgrounds, creating a unified yet complex visual field. However, the true dynamism of the work comes through the artist's deliberate use of combustion. Fire alters the papers' color, texture, and volume, introducing an element of unpredictability and chaos that contrasts sharply with the initial order. This act of burning results in residual ash and volume changes, adding a tactile, almost topographical dimension to the surface of the art. The interplay between the monochromatic background and the transformed, burnt papers creates a unique sense of spatiality, where controlled design and natural entropy coalesce into a single, captivating visual experience.



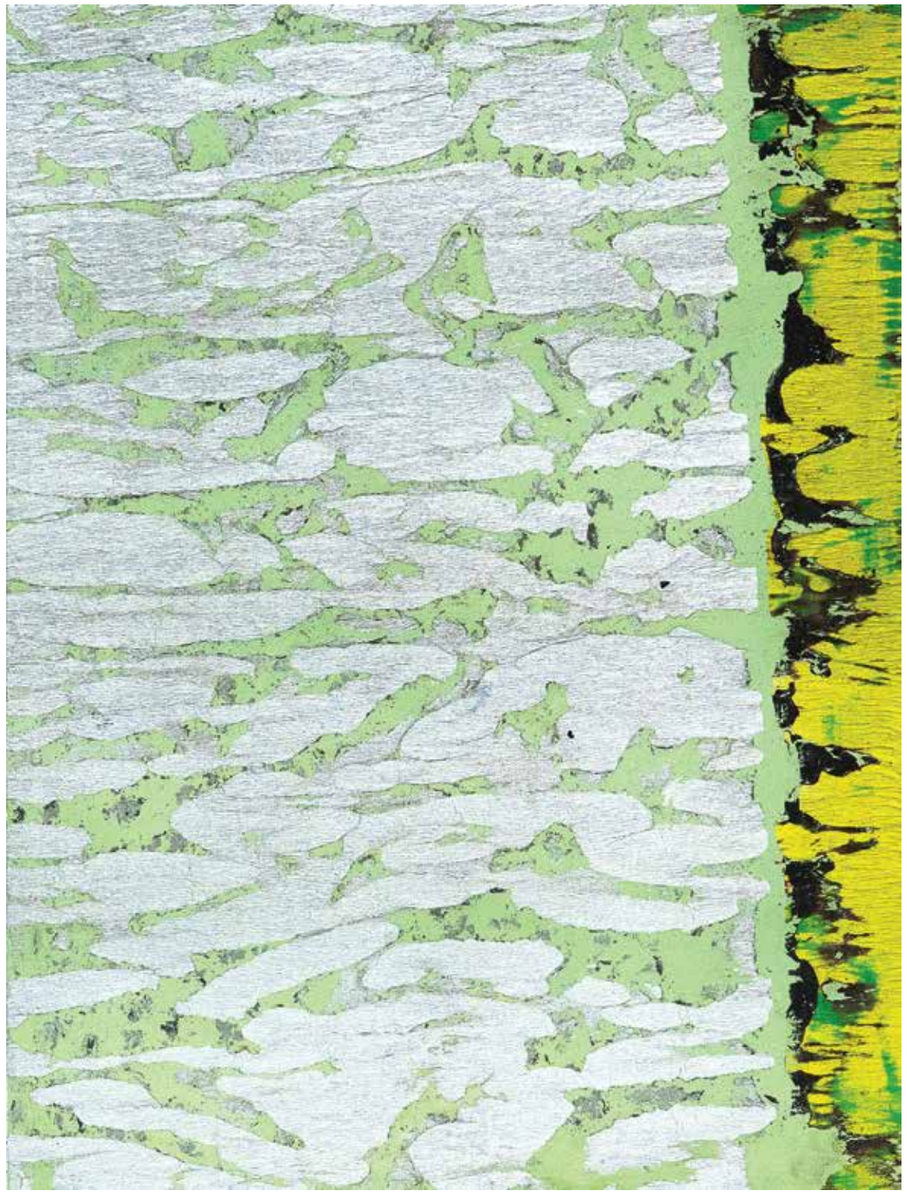
Rhythym #23

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 79.5x59.8 cm | 2018



Rhythym #24

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 79.5x59.8 cm | 2018



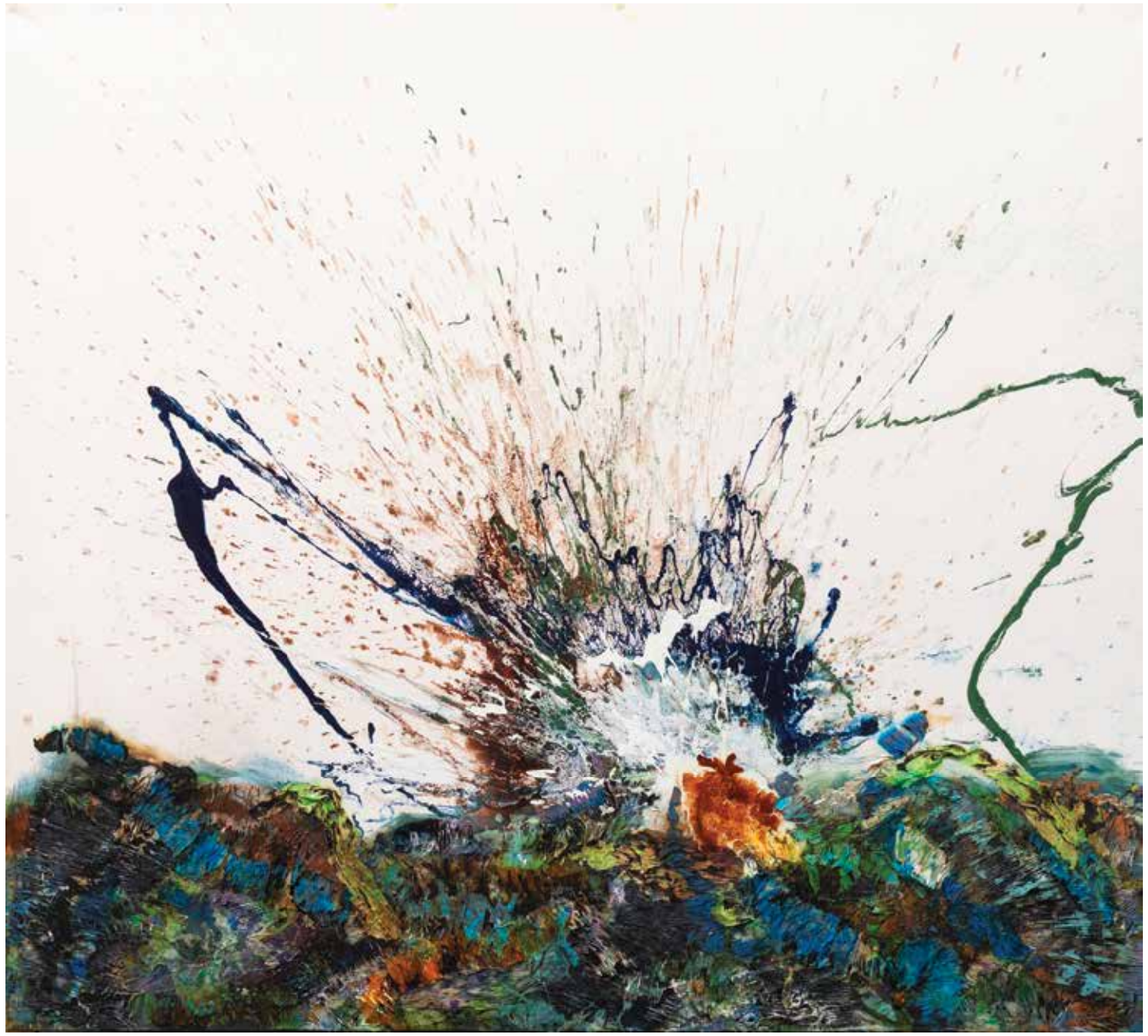
Rhythym #25

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 79.5x59.8 cm | 2018

Volcanoes series

In the “Volcanoes” series, Jean Boghossian celebrates the volcano as a metaphor for creative energy. Through material, fire, and color, he evokes the power of a world in formation, where the earth is reshaped by inner forces. Bursts and projections become the language of a painting in eruption, revealing the intimate geology of the canvas. Each work appears to emerge from successive layers — like those of the earth's crust — reflecting the constant dialogue between combustion, sedimentation, and creation.





Volcano #37

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 180x200 cm | 2023



Volcano #35

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2023



Volcano #33
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 85x85 cm | 2023



Volcano #38
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 200x170 cm | 2023





Volcano #42
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 180x210 cm | 2023



Volcano #49
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 180x210 cm | 2023



Volcano #66

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 80x181 cm | 2024

Babel Towers series

In the “Babel Towers” series, Jean Boghossian reinterprets the ancient myth through ceramic sculpture. Composed of stacked, irregular layers that evoke both architectural strata and fragile parchment sheets, these works resemble ascending temples, structures rising toward an unseen summit.

Each element appears weathered, marked by fire and time, as if bearing the memory of civilizations. The layered construction suggests both sediment and scripture, recalling humanity's enduring desire to build, to reach upward, and to gather knowledge. Through clay, earth transformed by fire, the artist connects the spiritual ambition of temples with the material reality of the ground from which they emerge.

The reference to the Tower of Babel evokes the idea of universal knowledge and a shared human aspiration: the longing to transcend boundaries of language, culture, and geography. Yet the fragile balance of the stacked forms also speaks of vulnerability : the tension between unity and fragmentation.

In this series, Boghossian transforms ceramic into a metaphor for civilization itself: layered, ambitious, and profoundly human.





Babel Tower #3

Glazed porcelain sculpture | 50x35x34 cm | 2023



Babel Tower #4

Glazed porcelain sculpture with Bloodstone & Ocean Jasper | 52x40x40 cm | 2021



Babel Tower #6
Glazed porcelain sculpture with Crazy Lace Agate, Botswana Agate, Plume Agate & Dendritic Agate & Jaspers
29x28x26 cm | 2021



Babel Tower #6
Glazed porcelain sculpture | 45x38x32 cm | 2021





Babel Tower #8
Glazed porcelain sculpture with Ocean Jasper, Botwswana Agate, Banded Carnelian & Blue Mountain | 33x36x34 cm | 2021



Babel Tower #7
Glazed porcelain sculpture with Tree Agate | 40x42x42 cm | 2020



Babel Tower #16
Glazed porcelain sculpture | 50x25x28 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #18
Glazed porcelain sculpture | 20x9x8 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #13
Glazed porcelain sculpture |32x35x26 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #14
Glazed porcelain sculpture | 30x34x23 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #12
Glazed porcelain sculpture | 20x35x38 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #22
Glazed porcelain sculpture | 20x25x26 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #7
Glazed porcelain sculpture| 38x49x15 cm | 2020



Babel Tower #11
Glazed porcelain sculpture| 30x38x35 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #19
Glazed porcelain sculpture| 30x16x14 cm | 2025



Babel Tower #21
Glazed porcelain sculpture| 42x9x10 cm | 2025

Standing Woods series

The “Standing Woods” series is approached as a living, historical material, one that carries memory, resistance, and latent energy. Through massives sculpture, Jean Boghossian disciplines the trunks, bending the material to his will and shaping it into resolute forms.

The works emerge from a transformative process that combines controlled combustion, carving, establishing a dynamic tension between mastery and release. Fire, void, and rhythm operate as structuring forces, shaping forms that exist at the threshold between destruction and renewal.



Babel

Pyro-Lacquered wooden sculpture | 290x30 cm | 2017



Totem

Pyro-Lacquered wooden sculpture | 200x76 cm | 2015-2025



Cones

Pyro-Lacquered wooden sculpture | 153x30 cm | 2024

Tribute to Hokusai series

In 2018, Jean Boghossian had worked with a mixture of plaster and paint, and by chance, a spray of plaster took the shape of a large imposing wave, revealing a beautiful balance. This unintentional nod to the artist Hokusai had encouraged him to continue down this path, developing the wave with beautiful textures, cracks, and spreading color through the plaster. His wish was to solidify this series by exploring the maritime theme and all the natural elements that accompany it. Art and the sea had come together to inspire him. For Jean, the seashore is a true source of inspiration. It is a landscape of ever-changing colors and lights, always in motion, highlighting the artistic beauty of water.





Tribute to Hakusai #62

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 250x350 cm | 2018



Tribute to Hakusai #42

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 50.3x60.3 cm | 2019



Tribute to Hakusai #17

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 77.5x97.5 cm | 2022



Tribute to Hakusai #19
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 63.5x97.5 cm | 2023



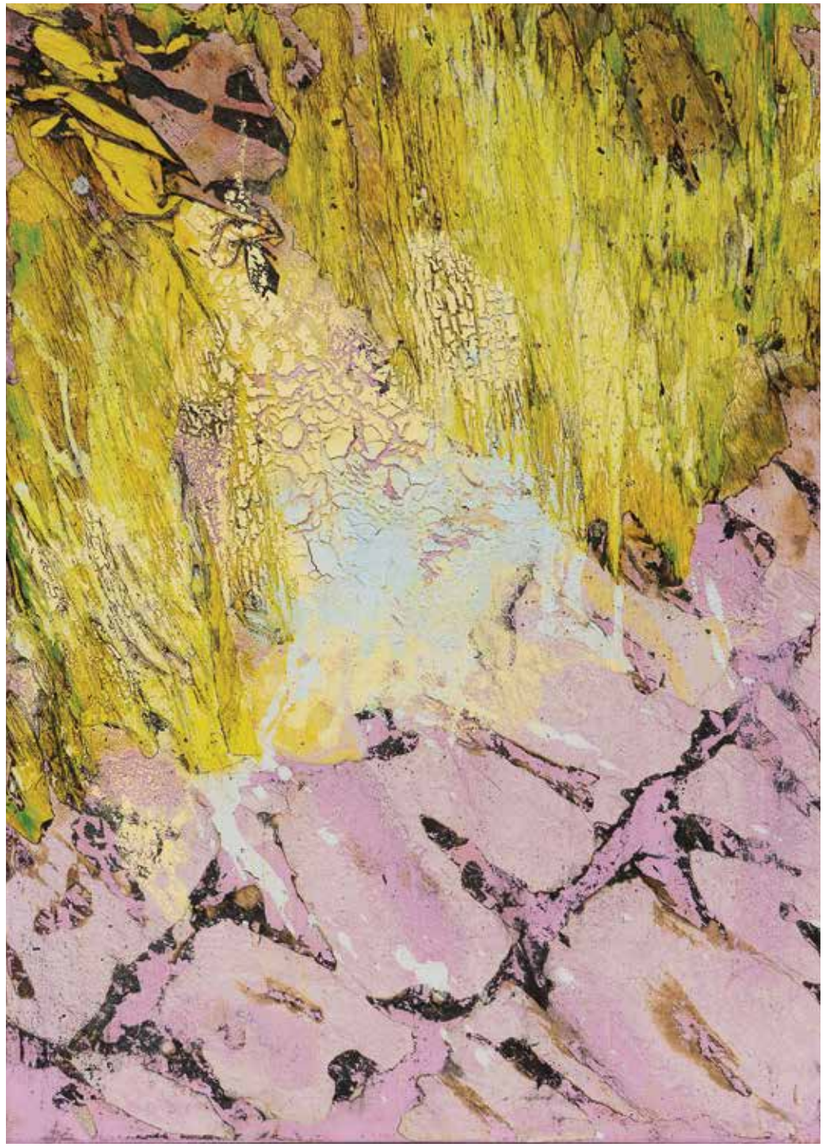
Tribute to Hakusai #11
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 98x67 cm | 2020



Tribute to Hakusai #44
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 40x50 cm | 2020



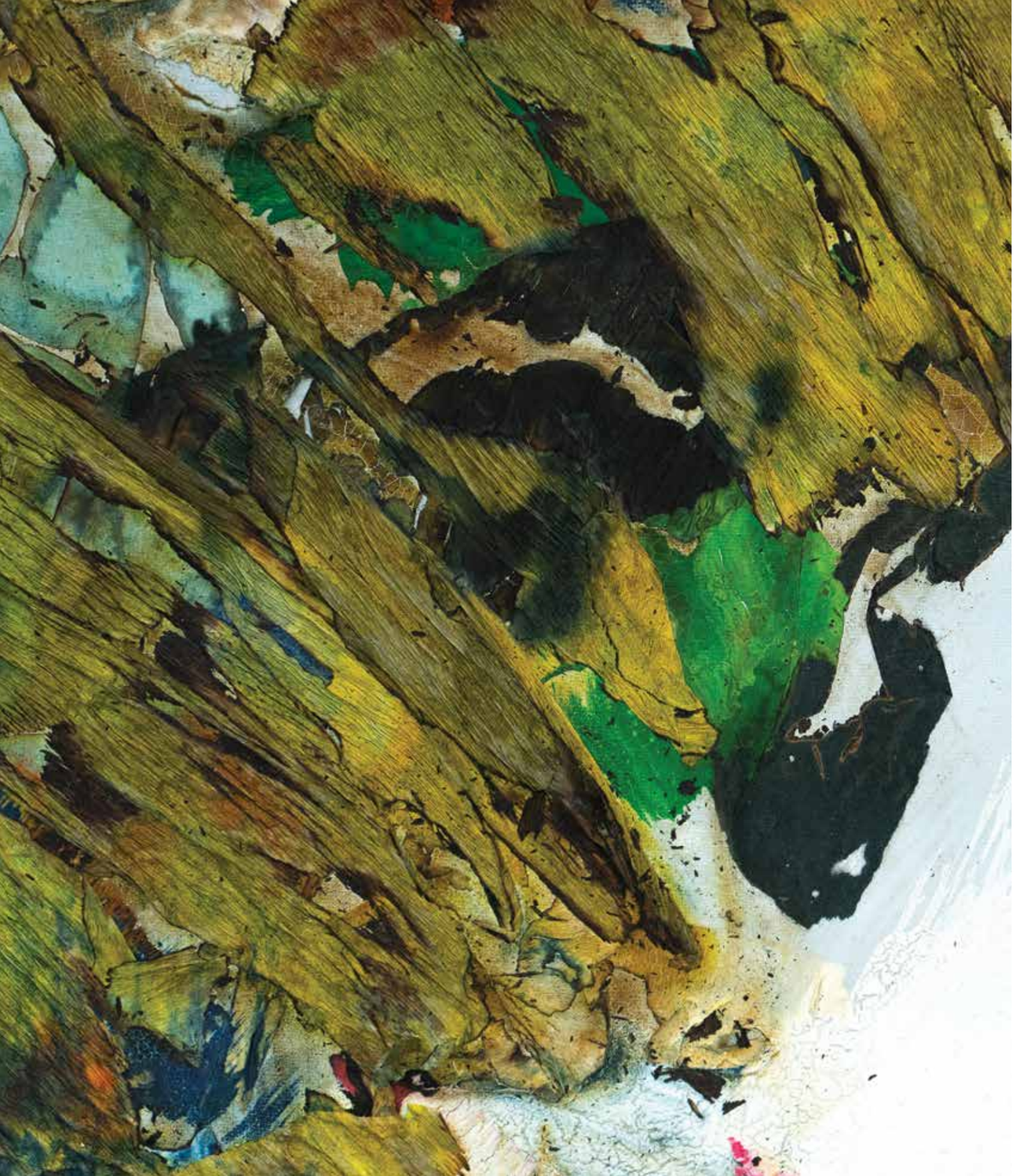
Tribute to Hakusai #43
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 40x50 cm | 2020



Tribute to Hakusai #28
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 70x50 cm | 2020



Tribute to Hakusai #41
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 40.5x30.5 cm | 2021





Tribute to Hakusai #47

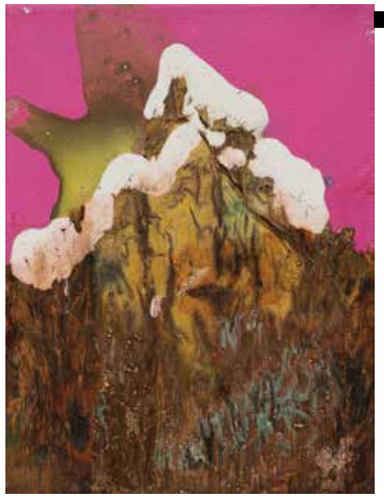
Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 77.5x97.5 cm | 2020



Tribute to Hakusai #46

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 67.5x98 cm | 2020







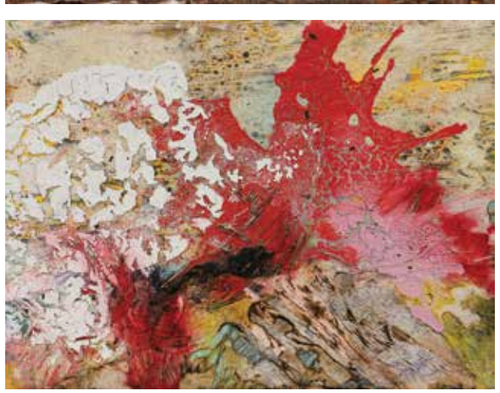


Tribute to Hakusai #52, 55, 56

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 24x18 cm each | 2015-2020









Tribute to Hakusai #48, 57,51, 50

Burnt mixed media on acrylic on canvas | 18x24cm each | 2020

About Jean Boghossian

Jean Boghossian is a Belgian multidisciplinary artist of Lebanese-Armenian origin, renowned for his distinctive use of fire and smoke in abstract art. Born in Aleppo in 1949 into a family of jewelers, he initially worked in the family business while studying economics and sociology at Saint Joseph University in Beirut. The Lebanese civil war prompted his move to Belgium in 1975, where he fully embraced his artistic path.

He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Boitsfort and Uccle while continuing his involvement in the jewelry trade. In 1988, his practice took a decisive turn when he began experimenting with fire as a medium.

This controlled use of burning became his signature, expressing a tension between destruction and renewal. Boghossian describes his process as a "fire dance," a search for balance within chaos, placing his work in dialogue with artists such as Burri, Fontana, Pollock, Klein, and Kounellis. His commitment to the arts also led to the co-founding of the Boghossian Foundation at Villa Empain in Brussels in 1992, alongside his father and brother.

Working across diverse media —including canvas, paper, books, and plastics— he combines materials such as watercolor, charcoal, oil, pigments, and acrylic, along with techniques like folding and collage. His work has increasingly moved toward abstraction and extends into sculpture, using wood, marble, clay, and bronze, as well as more recent explorations in ceramics.

Internationally recognized, Boghossian has exhibited widely, including representing Armenia at the Venice Biennale in 2017. Recent exhibitions have taken place in Korea, Lebanon, Monaco, Italy, Belgium and Qatar.

Through his unique use of fire, he continues to explore contemporary themes, establishing himself as a significant figure in today's art world.



Jean Boghossian burning in his studio in Brussels, 2023 | Photo © Studio Jean Boghossian ▸

SALEH BARAKAT GALLERY
صالح بركات

© Saleh Barakat Gallery - All rights reserved
A Special Thanks to Jean Boghossian Team
Design by Carol Chehab
Photos © Studio Jean Boghossian
Printed by Salim Dabbous Printing Co. sarl
October, 2026
Saleh Barakat Gallery Beirut | Justinian St. | Clemenceau
Beirut | Lebanon
info@salehbarakatgallery.com
www.salehbarakatgallery.com

@salehbarakatgallery
Saleh Barakat Gallery
@_SBGallery

